DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 338 598 SP 033 405

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TITLE Effective Teacher Behaviors: A Survey of In-Service Special Educators.
PUB DATE Oct 91
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Special Education; *Special Education Teachers; Surveys; *Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Effectiveness; *Teaching Experience; *Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Rank Order

ABSTRACT

In an effort to generate a list of effective teacher behaviors for special education, a survey was taken of special education teachers (N=41). The teachers were asked to rank order 11 skill areas according to their relative importance in effective teaching and to utilize their knowledge and experience to specify effective performance behaviors in each of the following areas: classroom management; behavior management; professional behavior; lesson preparation; subject presentation; interpersonal relationships; professional knowledge; multicultural awareness; knowledge relevant to special education field; teaching skills; and general information/common sense. Respondents were also requested to provide a maximum of five descriptive phrases to define each ranked area. Survey results from the 25 responding teachers were compiled for the total group and for each category. Behavior and classroom management were the two areas most valued for effective teaching. The consensus reached by these survey respondents reflected their practical experiences in the field and was an initial step toward identification and clarification of requisite behaviors for effective teaching. (LL)

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Effective Teacher Behaviors:

A Survey of In-Service Special Educators

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EFFECTIVE TEACHER BEHAVIORS

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Effective Teacher Behaviors:

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Abstract

Practicing special educators rank ordered eleven skill areas according to their relative importance to effective teaching. Respondents also provided a maximum of five descriptive phrases to define each ranked area. Survey results from the twenty-five responding cooperating teachers in six different class categories were compiled for the total group and for each category. Behavior management and classroom management were the two areas most valued by these special educators in the total group for effective teaching. These same areas were also identified as most necessary by teachers in four of the six special education categories. The top 60% of all descriptors were specified for each of the eleven skill areas in order to define and objectify each. The consensus reached by these survey respondents reflected their practical experiences in the field and was an initial step toward identification and clarification of requisite behaviors for effective teaching.

Effective Teacher Behaviors:

A Survey of In-Service Special Educators

Introduction

An effective special education teacher can be identified with little effort by anyone who has observed the individual and is familiar with the profession. Effective teacher behaviors might be identified just as easily by analyzing and then specifying those highly rated teachers' skills. A consensus regarding essential behaviors has never been achieved, however (Houston, 1990, p. 374; Blanton & Fimian, 1986; Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease, 1983; Englert, 1983). Such an agreement would be beneficial to both the profession and teacher training institutions (Houston, 1990, p. 288). If a list of requisite behaviors could be generated, any in-service or pre-service program could be geared toward the development of these necessary skills. Teacher training could become more efficient and effective as well if it focused upon the specific components of good teaching. Extraneous activities and non-essential skills could then be pared; emphasis could then be placed upon the

identification, development, analysis and evaluation of effective special teacher behaviors.

In-service special educators have practical, day-to-day experiences in applying the information learned in their teacher training. They also have the ability to identify knowledge relevant to teaching exceptional children. That is, in-service educators should be able to identify the effective teacher behaviors (what works) and the pragmatic information (what they need to know to make it work).

If "good" special educators could be identified, they should be the expert sources from whom a consensus may be drawn regarding effective teaching. Indeed, research has shown in-service educators' opinions closely correlate with the results of studies focusing on positive teaching behaviors (Isaacson, Prehm & McCoy, 1985). Special educators analyze skills, specify behaviors and write objectives for students as a matter of daily practice. It would, therefore, seem likely that they should be able to perform the same for their peers and pre-service special education teachers. To pool such analyses would be an initial step in

compiling an effective teacher skills consensus. Furthermore, by identifying such teacher behaviors across exceptionalities, it could be determined if these skills were non-categorical or category specific. This additional information would also indicate any need for future service training adjustments.

Method

Participants: Forty-one special education teachers from the Lancaster County area were identified using the Millersville University's Department of Special Education's co-operating teacher list. This listing identified in-service teachers available for student teacher placements. Cooperating teachers were required to meet both departmental and employer criteria. At the time of the present study, these co-operating teachers were located in a variety of exceptional classroom "categories" in both elementary and secondary settings. Identified individuals were contacted through a cover letter and survey form. They were requested to rank eleven specified skill areas according to the relative importance of each area to teaching performance. In addition, the teachers were asked to objectively define these same

areas with up to five descriptors. They were requested to use their own skills and experiences to define effective special educator characteristics. Twenty-five surveys were received yielding a 60.98% return rate. Respondents, identified by present exceptionality, number and their percentage to the total contribution include:

Learning disabilities	9, 38%
Educable mentally retarded	6, 25%
Mixed category	5, 21%
Socially and emotionally disturbed	2, 8%
Trainable mentally retarded	2, 8%
Physically handicapped	1, 4%.

Target Behaviors: Surveyed co-operating teachers were requested to utilize their knowledge and experiences to specify effective performance behaviors in each of the eleven listed areas. In addition, these special education teachers were to prioritize the eleven general areas:

Classroom management

Behavior management

Professional behavior

Lesson preparation

Subject presentation

Interpersonal relationships

Professional knowledge

Multi-cultural awareness

Knowledge relevant to special education field

Teaching skills

General information/common sense

that had been "gleaned" from Millersville University's present student teacher evaluation form and College of Education goals statement. Respondents also listed their present exceptionality placement and years of teaching experience.

Data Collection: A master list of the eleven general areas and the rankings given by each of the respondents was compiled. Rankings were then weighted in decreasing order (a rank #1 received 100 points, rank #5 received 60 and rank #11 [least important] received 0) to provide each area with a point total. These weighted point totals established priority orders for each

exceptional category, as well as for an overall (all respondents) category.

All performance objectives or behavioral descriptors provided by respondents to define the eleven general areas were also combined into a master list by area. Similar definitions were collapsed and a frequency count determined for each area. To provide a clear and inclusive description by consensus for the areas, the top 60% (or over one-half of the most frequently used) descriptors were identified.

Results: Years of teaching experience for the twenty-five respondents ranged from four to twenty-five with a mean of 12.96 years. Ranking of the eleven general areas for all respondents (regardless of teaching category) and for specific exceptional categories are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Weighted Score* and Ranking of Areas - Total Group

Imported Teaching Areas

*Weighted Score	Rank	% of Total	General Area
1790	1	15.3	Behavior Management
1710	2	14.6	Classroom Management
1430	3	12.2	Teaching Skills
1360	4	11.6	Lesson Preparation
1290	5	11.0	Subject Presentation
1020	6	8.7	Professional Behavior
880	7	7.5	General Information
800	8	6.8	Knowledge of Special Ed.
800	8	6.8	Interpersonal Relations
500	9	4.3	Professional Knowledge
120	10	1.0	Multi-Cultural Awareness

*NOTE: Weighted Score = rank values total multiplied by number of ranking received: Rank #1 - 100 Rank value, Rank #2 = 90, Rank #3 = 80..., Rank #11 = 0.

As indicated in Table 1, after weighting individual rankings, survey respondents viewed Behavior Management as the most important component for effective teaching. The second most valued area, according to the twenty-five teachers, was Classroom Management. In addition, Multi-cultural Awareness was identified as the least valued area for special education teachers. As noted in Table I, knowledge relevant to special education and interpersonal relationships received equal weight totals and, therefore, share rank #8. Area rankings by special category are provided in Table 2. Again, it must be noted that areas sharing ranks have received equal weight totals. In all categories but physically handicapped, Classroom and Behavior Management were the top two areas.

Table 2
Ranking of General Areas by Categories
Important Teaching Areas

Rank	Categories					
	LD	TMR	SED	PH	EMR	Mixed Category
1	Classroom Management	Behavior Management	Behavior Management	Interpersonal Relationships	Behavior Management	Teaching Skills
2	Behavior Management	Classroom Management	Classroom Management	General Information	Classroom Management	Classroom Management
3	Teaching Skills	General Information	Professional Behaviors	Special Educ. Knowledge	Subject Presentation	Lesson Preparation
4	Lesson Preparation	Lesson Preparation	Teaching Skills	Professional Behavior	Lesson Preparation	Subj. Prep. Beh. Mgmt.
5	Subject Presentation	Teach. Skills SPED Knowledge Subj. Present.	Subject Presentation	Lesson Preparation	Teaching Skills	Interpersonal Relationships
6	Interpersonal Relationships	Prof. Behaviors Interp. Relation.	Lesson Preparation	Subject Presentation	General Information	Professional Behavior
7	SPED Knowledge General Info.	Professional Knowledge	Special Ed. Knowledge	Teaching Skills	Professional Behavior	Professional Knowledge
8	Professional Knowledge	Multicultural Awareness	Professional Knowledge	Multicultural Awareness	Special Ed. Knowledge	General Information
9	Professional Behavior	--	Interpersonal Relationships	Behavior Management	Interpersonal Relationships	Special Ed. Knowledge
10	Multicultural Awareness	--	Multicultural Awareness	Classroom Management	Prof. Knowledge Multi. Aware.	Multicultural Awareness
11	--	--	General Information	Professional Knowledge		

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The top 60% of descriptors for each of the eleven general areas were also determined and are included in Chart 1.

Chart 1
Effective Teacher Behaviors
Ranked Areas and Top Sixty Percent Descriptors

Rank	Topic + Descriptors	In Each Rank Top 60% Used
1	**Behavior Management**	
	1. Consistent/fair discipline	27.0
	2. Variety of approaches	17.0
	3. Assertive/commands	11.0
	4. Positive reinforce-	11.0
		66%T
2	**Class Management**	
	1. Follows routine	25.3
	2. Control	17.6
	3. Student rapport	13.2
	4. Flexible	8.8
		64.9%T
3	**Teaching Skills**	
	1. Teaching styles	14.8
	2. Assesses current educ. levels	13.1
	3. Content knowledge	8.2
	4. Empathy	6.6
	5. Task analysis	6.6
	6. Relates activities to content	6.6
	7. Communicates clearly	4.9
		60.8%T
4	**Lesson Preparation**	
	1. Prepared	14.1
	2. Employs a variety of resources	11.8
	3. Preplans contingencies	9.4
	4. Determines skills to be taught	8.2
	5. Objectives	8.2
	6. Determines student functioning levels	7.1
	7. Clear, concise plans	7.1
		65.9%T
5	**Subject Presentation**	
	1. Adapts plans to student needs	15.5
	2. Variety of teaching methods ie group,	14.3
	3. Enthusiasm	9.5
	4. Materials to cover subj.	8.3
	5. Measures learning	8.3
	6. Sequences learning	8.3
		64.2%T
6	**Professional Behavior**	
	1. Mature	17.8
	2. Positive teacher attitude	15.6
	3. Confidentiality	13.3
	4. Punctual/reliable	10.0
	5. Shares ideas	6.7
		63.4%T
7	**General Information**	
	1. Motivation	15.8
	2. Accepts/respects	15.8
	3. Mature	8.8
	4. Organized	8.8
	5. Tries new things	8.8
	6. Knowledge of current events	8.8
		66.8%T
	Special Education Knowledge	
	1. Teaching techniques	20.4
	2. Exceptionality characteristics	14.8
	3. Current trends	14.8
	4. Laws and regulations	11.1
		61.1%T
8	**Interpersonal Relationships**	
	1. Positive rapport	26.8
	2. Communication skills	21.1
	3. Uses feedback on performance	7.0
	4. Defers to authority	7.0
	5. Cooperative	7.0
		68.9%T
9	**Professional Knowledge**	
	1. SPED trends & issues	25.0
	2. Utilizes informational resources	21.7
	3. Interest in professional growth	20.0
		66.7%T
10	**Multicultural Awareness**	
	1. Respects different cul- and behaviors	45.7
	2. Religious/holiday customs	13.0
	3. Family dynamics	8.7
		67.4%

Discussion:

In the present study, surveyed special education teachers ranked Behavior Management and Classroom Management as the two most important general areas for effective teacher performance. Behavior management was most commonly defined as being "consistent and fair in disciplining." Classroom Management was most often described as "following a routine." Teachers across the special education categories were in agreement regarding the areas of Behavioral and Classroom Management. Regardless of their students'exceptionality (learning disabiled, mentally retarded, or emotionally disturbed), the teachers felt that these skills were necessary for effectiveness. A second major area of agreement across exceptionalities was the low ranking of Multi-cultural Awareness. Since special education teachers work with multi-cultural students on a daily basis, this might be viewed as a contradiction. Perhaps this difference can be explained by the overall theme of the respondents' descriptors in all eleven areas. Special education teachers consider individual differences and address individual needs. They tend to work with single student, not whole group, emphasis. The variance of physically handicapped

category requires further study, but may be attributed to the low n (1), the conditions of the students, or a combination of the two.

Descriptors identify the need for eclectic approaches necessary for meeting the unique needs of each student. Such teacher behaviors are valuable in preparing and executing an effective lesson. In general, special education respondents agree on relevant characteristics of effective teaching. They have employed descriptors that stress individuality and uniqueness of students. Such behaviors require an effective special education teacher to be aware and involved with individual students, as well as in possession of a wide repertoire of knowledge bases and methodologies. Results also indicate a need for teacher training emphasis in the "management" areas of Behavior and Classroom. The need for competence in lesson preparation and execution was highlighted as well. The validity of non-categorical, pre-service preparation was also substantiated by agreement across exceptionalities.

In conclusion, information offered by good special education in-service teachers should provide meaningful guidelines for effective teacher behaviors. The experiences and insights of these teachers are valuable but, to date, are untapped resources. They should be specified and shared. As the skills of effective teachers are identified, training emphases needs to be adjusted accordingly.

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